

## **Defender of Integrity: The Story of Paul Simon**

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When people think of crime fighters, some conjure images of comic book characters. Others think of police officers or the FBI. Few would think of a writer. Yet, Paul Simon, as a young man, fought crime in Illinois with the written word for years and was successful in reforming the law. Because of this Simon will always be remembered not only as a political figure of both Illinois and the United States government, but as a journalist seeking to correct injustice and corruption.

In 1948, when Paul Simon was 19, he dropped out of college in Nebraska and bought the *Troy Tribune* in Troy, Illinois in Madison County. At this time, he was the youngest newspaper publisher in the country. The newspaper was published weekly and was a constant challenge for him because he was learning how to run a business for the first time. The news which was covered did not often extend beyond the small town of 1,200 in which the newspaper was based.

Simon wrote occasional editorials about world events in the hopes that his writings would be noticed by other newspapers, but he soon began focusing on the town's needs. The town had no sewer system, and Simon decided to fight for one. He wrote on the topic for over a year. Eventually, his argument progressed to front-page editorials that called for the installation of a sewer system. He berated the city council for not advancing the project. After another three months of editorials, the city residents voted to have a sewer system.

The *Troy Tribune* accomplished several other things in its early years, but these dealt mostly with small-town affairs. Larger issues had yet to arise.

Nearly a year after he came to Troy, Simon began to address the issues of illegal gambling. Throughout the town, there were punchboards, which were a type of gambling device. At this time, nearly all the states had outlawed gambling. When contacted, the sheriff's office refused to comment, and it was known that the sheriff and the state's attorney were being paid off to allow the activity to continue. Simon published an article about the punchboards and began receiving calls from people in other parts of the country with stories about gambling. He wrote open letters in the newspaper to the sheriff and state's attorney calling them to do something about the affair.

Soon after these letters were printed, the sheriff and state's attorney "announced with great fanfare that they had closed two houses of prostitution about seven miles from Troy, and had taken away their liquor licenses." Simon investigated and found the houses to still be carrying on business as usual, minus serving alcohol. He decided to pay a visit to one of the houses, after which he printed a recollection in an editorial of his personal visit and how he was offered a girl in the establishment. A few weeks later, the sheriff shut down the two businesses.

However, this was not the end of Simon's crusades. He addressed an open letter to the state's attorney asking him if realized that there was wide-open gambling in the county and if he intended to do anything about it. Nothing came of it, however, and Simon continued his articles. Later he received a letter from the executive secretary to the governor which said "the better known gambling places in your county will be closed either due to action taken by your own authorities or by some other types of action which

might have to be taken.” Simon printed the letter in his newspaper and on the afternoon it came out, the first state police raid in Illinois history took place. Fifty-one officers from northern Illinois came down to Hyde Park and the 200 Club, two places known for gambling, and arrested 54 men.

After this raid, gambling continued, though on a smaller scale. Simon wrote to the Illinois Bar Association to request that the state’s attorney be disbarred. The *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, along with other newspapers in the area, also urged the Illinois Bar Association to act. Once it was clear that the Bar Association took the charges seriously, “Madison County became cleanest county in the state, and it has never since reverted fully to its former status.”

When an illegal gambling house sprang up in Madison County, Simon notified the new state’s attorney. The latter took his new job seriously, and Simon saw the gambling house close.

In 1958, a mobster muscled his way into a monopoly on cigarette vending machines at the Fairmount Race Track. Simon editorialized against it and effected a change.

Simon eventually bought out fifteen other small town newspapers, which he ran until he sold the entire organization. He continued to fight for what he saw as right. He used the power of the press to make improvements; however, he soon realized he could do more by entering politics. He campaigned and was elected to the Illinois House of Representatives and served from 1955 to 1963. From there, he went on to serve in the Illinois State Senate, as Illinois Lieutenant Governor, and the United States Senator. He made a bid for the Democratic Party nomination for president in the 1988 election. Even

though this failed, he was respected and honored by members of both parties. Simon continued to write about what he saw as wrong his entire life, and he wrote a total of 22 books. One book which he wrote dealt with the biography of Elijah Lovejoy, a newspaper editor who led a campaign against slavery in Madison County in 1830s and was killed for speaking his views.

Paul Simon will be remembered as many things, including a crime fighter. He did what he felt was right and fought to correct injustices. His campaign against corruption shows the true power of journalism in the hands of a determined individual. [From *Belleville New Democrat*, (Jan. 23, 2005); "Biography of Paul Simon." *Paul Douglas Ethics in Government*. <<http://www.igpa.uillinois.edu/ethics/simon-bio.htm>>. (Dec. 13, 2004); Ryan Keith, "Former two-term Sen. Paul Simon of Illinois dies at 75; day after undergoing heart surgery." SFGate.com (Dec. 19, 2004); Paul Simon, *The Autobiography of Paul Simon*.]